

KELLY AIR FORCE BASE, BARRACKS
(KELLY AIR FORCE BASE, BUILDING 1650)
(KELLY AIR FORCE BASE, "THE PALACE")
ON GOODRICH DRIVE BETWEEN LOMBARD AND MOORMAN STREETS
SAN ANTONIO
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

HABS No. TX-3396-AC

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Rocky Mountain System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
KELLY AIR FORCE BASE, BARRACKS
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For information about other structures at Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas, see:

HABS Nos: TX-3396-A through TX-3396-AB, and HAER No. TX-23-A.

Location: Building 1650 is located in the 1600 Area of Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. The building faces onto Goodrich Drive on the Northeast and is bounded by Lombard Street on the Northwest, Luke Drive on the Southwest, and Moorman Street on the Southeast. UTM Coordinates: 14 563500 2136500.

29.382205, -98.571284, Google Earth, obtained 4 March 2013

Constructor: Office of the Quartermaster General

Construction Date: November 24, 1940

Present Owner: U.S. Air Force

Original Use: Dormitory and Mess Hall

Present Use: Dormitory and Food Service

Significance: Building 1650 was associated with the World War II-era redevelopment of Kelly Air Force Base. This phase of construction was initiated, in part, by a letter from the Inspector General to the Chief of Staff who asserted that the poor conditions at Kelly Field prevented the installation from fulfilling its training mission. The letter prompted an investigation in 1937, which led the army to recognize the need to provide base residents with more permanent housing. As a result, multi-story, multi-family residences, and barracks were constructed at present-day Kelly Air Force Base, in the 1940s. Kelly achieved national importance for its flight training mission during this period and for its relatively luxurious

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accommodations for flight cadets and enlisted personnel. Building 1650 replaced the dilapidated World War I-era wooden barracks, and was so much more comfortable than the older barracks that it received its nickname, "The Palace," by the first men who lived there. Although some minor additions and alterations have diminished the integrity of the structure, there is sufficient original architectural fabric remaining to identify the structure with its primary period of significance, 1940-1946. Building 1650 is a significant example of the transitional stylistic aspects of American public architecture as International Style influences merged with and overtook regionally influenced styles such as Spanish Colonial Revival.

Project Information:

As part of an effort to document historic properties located at Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Worth District, contracted with Geo-Marine, Inc., of Plano, Texas, to produce HABS documentation for Building 1650. This project was awarded under Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 0105.

During 1995, the report was researched and prepared by Joe Freeman, Architect, Historical Architect, and consultant to Komatsu/Rangel, Inc. Mr. Freeman also took the large-format photographs.

Description:

Building 1650 is a three-story structure built on an elevated concrete foundation. The structure is composed of a three-story, gabled mess hall over a basement with a projecting one-story, kitchen wing and two "U"-shaped, three-story dormitory wings. Four of the dormitory wings were planned originally, but only two wings, the northeast wing

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and the northwest wing, were actually built. The building has elements of highly styled Spanish Colonial Revival detailing (such as the mess hall and entrance surrounds at the dormitory wings) that are combined with functional architectural expression (such as rectangular openings and an absence of decoration) at the kitchen wing and the dormitory wings.

The reinforced concrete-framed structure sits on concrete piers. The piers support a suspended concrete floor framing system of beams, joists, and slabs. Concrete columns support the upper floor systems and the flat roof decks. The gable roof of the mess hall is framed with 2 x 10 wood rafters which sit atop 2 x 8 wood plates anchored to concrete beams. The rafters rise to a ridge piece and the rafters support decking and the heavy tile roof above. The cast-in-place concrete is designed for infill with hollow clay tile to form walls. The structural system is designed to resist the forces of soil movement by means of a rigid frame and connections, and by grade beams that have "V"-shaped bottoms to deflect soil upthrust caused by highly expansive clay soils. These "V"-shaped grade beam bottoms can also be seen in construction drawings of earlier phases of construction at Kelly, including the work of Albert Kahn.

Besides the gabled, barrel-tiled roof of the mess hall, the roofs of the dormitory and kitchen wings are built-up "tar and gravel" roofing on lightweight insulating concrete. The built-up roofs are hidden behind simple parapets capped with metal copings. The parapets differ from the original construction documents which show highly-detailed limestone parapets. The roofs slope toward the parapets where through-parapet roof drains collect the water and convey it to external

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conductor boxes and downspouts and then to underground drainage systems. The drainage system for the tile roof consists of half-round copper gutters and copper conductor boxes and downspouts.

The exterior architectural surface of Building 1650 is painted stucco with limestone detailing. The Spanish Colonial Revival style is reflected at the gable ends of the mess hall and at entrances to the dormitory wings. The mess hall facades have raised porches and large, wood-paneled double doors with an arched transom above. Above the doors are five arched windows with one-over-one sashes. The windows are inset and the arch molding projects from the face of the wall. A single oculus is placed high in the gables. The oculus is circular with a superimposed square that is expressed in the molding around the masonry opening. Attached stone columns with modified Corinthian capitals flank the doorway and support a compound arched molding at the transom. A keystone is located at the top of the transom arch. Wide scored attached pilasters rise beyond the columns to support an arcaded cornice. Above the doorway is a patriotic plaque with an American eagle motif. Each wood door has twelve panels, eight of which are glazed.

The other building entrances are less grand but still reflect the Spanish Colonial Revival motif. One dormitory wing entrance has a flat arch and a projecting door surround topped by a cornice and a broken segmental arch and medallion. Now fitted with a fire exit door, this opening was once a window.

The dormitory wings, with the exception of the Spanish Colonial Revival-style entrances, are plainly designed and constructed. The flat stucco exterior surface is broken only by projecting

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window surrounds and a horizontal band at the base of the third-story windows. A three-story screened porch facing Goodrich Drive runs inside the center "U"-shape of the dormitory wings and expresses, in its bay spacings, the windows which open onto the porch.

Throughout the building, original industrial metal awning, hopper, casement and combination windows have been replaced with aluminum sashes and fire escapes have been added at the ends of the dormitory wings. The original two-story mess hall space has had an intermediate floor added. Some original exterior doors have been replaced with flush metal doors and the interior of the building has undergone numerous renovations as the changing mission of the installation created the need for additional space.

At the time of its construction, Building 1650 was heated by steam provided from a central plant to individual radiators. Cooling was by natural ventilation and convection. More recently, the building has been supplied with heated and chilled water to serve remote fan-coil units located throughout the building. Electrical service and distribution systems were a part of the original construction. Original drawings indicate that custom light fixtures were to be fabricated for the interior of the mess hall and the entrances to it. Due to interior renovations of the mess hall, the ornate pendent fixtures have been removed (location unknown); however the Spanish Colonial Revival-styled exterior lanterns attached to the pilasters at the entrances remain intact.

Building 1650 was not constructed entirely as planned. Two "U"-shaped dormitory wings were to be built at the southeast and southwest corners of the

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site, flanking the mess hall and opening toward Luke Drive. Although the primary facade was planned to be, and remains, along Goodrich Drive, the more highly styled architectural features of the building were relegated to secondary entrances into the mess hall. Interior finish materials have been upgraded, but the original double-loaded corridors of the dormitory wings remain unchanged.

History:

Building 1650 was designed for Kelly Field by Office of the Quartermaster General (OQMG) architects, and was considered a prototype, intended for use, with some modifications, in various climates within the Continental United States. Although it was designed by the OQMG, ownership was transferred from the Army to the Air Force when, in 1947, the Air Force became a separate department equal in status with the Army and Navy. Building 1650 was planned in January of 1939 as an enlisted men's barracks. Comprised of almost 200,000 square feet, it was the largest of the multiple construction projects undertaken between 1939 and 1942 to upgrade Kelly Field facilities.

The barracks were designed to house 2,081 men, and certain features were incorporated to facilitate the schedules of men involved in Air Corps activities. For example, cafeteria-style messing facilities permitted quicker service and provided meals at off-hours for crews whose meal times were irregular due to their activities.

Work began on the barracks June 23, 1939, and was completed November 24, 1940, at a cost of \$897,298.61. The new barracks replaced dilapidated, World War I-era wooden structures and offered such improvements in lodging, dining, and recreational facilities that enlisted men at Kelly

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nicknamed it "The Palace." Since World War II, Building 1650 has continued to serve as a barracks and has provided space for a number of other uses such as a bakery, ice house, bowling alley, post office, and library. Some alterations and additions have been made. The original windows have been replaced with aluminum sash, fire escapes have been added at the ends of the dormitory wings, the original two-story mess hall space has had an intermediate floor added, some of the original exterior doors have been replaced with flush metal doors, and the interior of the building has undergone changes to create additional space.

Original architectural drawings by the Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General are dated April 17, 1939 and are stored in the drawing files of the Civil Engineering Branch at Kelly Air Force Base.

Sources:

Freeman, Martha Doty, *Appendix L, Historic Context for Kelly Air Force Base: Kelly Air Force Base, An American Flying Field and Air Depot, 1917-1946*. Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas, 1992.

Kane, Kimberly L., and Joe Freeman, *An Architectural and Historical Assessment of 1600 and 1700 Art Moderne Area, Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas*. Miscellaneous Report of Investigations, Number 62. Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas, 1993.

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